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ABSTRACT

A central and repeated idea in education is the continuous need for change. This paper explores how to assess the ways change can be incorporated into the curriculum, and why stability is also important. The example of team teaching shows the way a concept may become accepted as a "fact" in spite of many weaknesses of the approach. Trends in education do not come and go rapidly, but fads do. Several examples are given of each, and suggestions are made for identifying what should be stable and what should be changed. Caution is recommended in adopting new ideas, but it is emphasized that educators must remain ready to accept changes that bring real benefits. The educator should stand firm until convinced that the reform is really headed in a positive direction. (Contains 12 references.) (SLD)

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Assessment and Stability in the Midst of Accelerated Change

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ASSESSMENT AND STABILITY IN THE MIDST OF ACCELERATED CHANGE

When reading educational literature and attending professional meetings in education, a central repeated idea is the continuous need for change. Writers and speakers emphasize the continual reconstruction of the curriculum. Sometimes, nothing is said about what the specific direction of change should be when ideas are presented pertaining to reconstruction. At other times, one or more specific changes are stressed in an article or speech. Then, the writer/speaker may say that research states that ---------- . The direction of change emphasized may then, for example, stress doing away with homogeneous grouping and/or tracking. Thus, "research says" that students do better in heterogeneous as compared to homogeneous grouped classes.

The balance of this writing will stress the need to assess how much change can be incorporated into the curriculum and why stability also needs to be emphasized. Also, why there are so many claims to support a specific position taken of what truly is an issue with its pros and cons. Selected educators can certainly be political in advocating an approach in teaching that is issue based to say the least (See Ediger, 2000, 41-46).

Issues Become Facts

There are numerous issues that have become facts to certain speakers and writers in education. Team teaching is one of these issues that has become a fact. Team teaching is extolled for the following reasons:

1. it does away with a teacher being a loner in the classroom.
2. several teachers are accountable for teaching a given set of students, not one teacher alone.
3. decisions made by a team are better, as compared to a single teacher, when choosing objectives, learning opportunities, and assessment procedures.

There are many disadvantages of team teaching, such as when team members fail to

1. get along with each other.
2. function as a harmonious group.
3 use their very own unique style of quality teaching. Gardner (1993) lists intrapersonal (working by the self to achieve optimally) and interpersonal (working with others to achieve as much as possible) as two intelligences possessed by individuals. And yet, s selected educators would place all teachers into teams.

The writer definitely prefers to work by the self as a teacher or professor. He would like to try team teaching if he could choose the other members of the team. The writer would also like to opt out of the team if there are human relations problems. When research says that ----------, and in this example students do better with being team taught as compared to being taught by an individual instructor, there are many weaknesses inherent in that statement:

1. generally some studies will show advantages and other studies disadvantages of team teaching.

2. there are many variables to consider in any experimental research study when comparing Experimental Group A with Experimental Group B. Thus between the two groups, there are variations in team teaching quality, abilities of students in one group as compared to the other when tests are used to measure student progress in the pretest, as well as tests used in the post test. These tests are subject to being questioned for validity and reliability.

3. the results of any study will lack external validity in that the conditions of the study are different from where the results might be applied.

4. the data of the study could be treated differently statistically as compared to the approach used. Instead of using the F test to make statistical comparisons among three groups, such as Experimental Groups A, B, and C, the writer of his doctoral dissertation used T tests to make comparisons between two groups at a time, such as Experimental Group A versus B, A versus C, and B versus C. An F test could also have been used in making comparisons among the three groups at one time. (See Ediger, 1963).

5. the results of the study may be interpreted in different and even in opposite ways. There was considerable disagreement when Coleman (1966, among other writings) came out with research results that Catholic students achieved better than did public school students. Many educators felt the comparisons were between apples and oranges in which the parochial schools differ much from public schools..

6. even if the experimental group with the new approach in teaching is statistically significant at the .05, .01, or .001 level, as compared to the control group with the traditional procedure of instruction, there still are students who do better in the control group. Never do 100% of students in the experimental group do better in achievement as compared to the control groups.

7. definition of terms is weak. Thus, a description of the control group with traditional teaching will be weak to say the least. If it is a text book centered approach in teaching, the teacher may still bring in student centered teaching with learner questions as well as the project method. Then too, what is meant by student centered teaching? How

student centered can the teaching be and would observers agree?

8. the independent variable is difficult to state. If team teaching is the independent variable being tested in the experimental group, it is difficult to be highly specific as to its meaning. Thus, there are a plethora of teams, such as the team leader, master teacher, cooperative type without a designated leader, student teacher/cooperating teacher, and regular teacher/mentor teacher types, among others. Also, the quality of team members cannot be described accurately.

9. both groups, the experimental and control, are difficult to equate when starting out initially in the research study at the same level of achievement. Even if random sampling is used in selecting the members for the experimental group and for the control group, there are sampling errors. Thus, if a new sample is drawn as participants for either group, the members would vary in achievement.

If the members in the experimental group versus the control group should vary initially in achievement, prior to beginning the study to determine which group achieves more, the experimental or the control group, a statistical technique known as analysis of covariance may be used and attempts made to equate initial achievement. But, analysis of covariance is not considered as accurate as random sampling for equating the two groups.

10. the length of the study is of utmost importance. Generally, the study is carried forth for a limited amount of time, such as one or two semesters. The time length here is too short. A longitudinal study should be in evidence covering several years of time to truly indicate, increasingly so, if students, for example, do better significantly with or without team teaching. The same students should be used in the study covering several school years of time. Here, a problem in the study may arise with mobility of students. Thus, students move in and move out of participating schools.

Writers and speakers in education may indicate their opinions as being factual when stressing the following in that the first is much superior to the latter:

1. heterogeneous as compared to homogeneous grouping.
2. the integrated as compared to the fused or correlated curriculum.
3. norm or criterion referenced testing as compared to contextualism in ascertaining student achievement.
4. high stakes testing as compared to student/teacher assessment of learner progress.
5. phonics versus whole language instruction in reading.
6. no social promotion as compared to providing for individual differences regardless of time limits in student achievement.
7. school bankruptcy laws as compared to funding each school adequately.

8. criticizing school achievement much as compared to supporting each school to assist students achieve more optimally.

9. not throwing money at schools as compared to adequate financing of schools.

10. merit pay for selected teachers as compared to offering adequate incentives for all teachers (See Ediger, 2000, 28-34).

The above are dilemma situations whereby decisions will need to be made on reason and logic. Reason and logic are used in making many curricular decisions. Quality is a key word when using reason and logic. In the heterogeneous vs. homogeneous grouping debate, certainly both kinds of grouping should be used, depending upon what benefits the individual student most. Thus, the gifted student may be left out of achieving optimally if heterogeneous grouping alone is used. Too frequently then, teaching to the lowest level of achievement in the classroom might well be in the offing. The other end of the continuum also need to achieve a swell as possible. Here, provision needs to be made to assist these learners to learn and achieve optimally. The more gifted and talented may then become pace setters for the less motivated.

Trends and Fads in the Curriculum

Trends tend to be somewhat stable in the curriculum. They stay with curriculum developers and makers for a certain period of time. Trends do not come and go quickly. Fads do come and go rapidly. One fad that was somewhat important in the 1970s was the Initial Teaching Alphabet (ITA). Very few teachers today have heard of the ITA. The ITA had 44 symbols which were represented by 44 different sounds. Although this was not quite the case. The letters "c," and "K" were two of the forty-four symbols with both making the same sound as in "cat" and "key." Each of the five long vowel sounds --a, e, i, o, and u --- had a letter "e" attached, whereas the short vowel sounds were written with the usual symbols. Additional generalizations pertaining to ITA include the following:

1. there was no differentiation made in forming upper and lower case letters, thus simplifying the reading/writing of ideas using ITA.

2. there was much consistency in spelling words with a strong grapheme/phoneme correspondence. There was one symbol representing one sound only, not two letters such as in <u>th</u>rough, <u>ph</u>one, and <u>sh</u>out. Thus, the "th" letters and well as the "sh" letters were hooked together, each as one symbol. The word "phone" was spelled as "foen.," with the oe hooked together.

3. there are no silent letters in spelling and reading words, such as in cake, make, and bake; each of these words has a silent letter "e."

4. somewhat new symbols were developed for the "oi" sound as in boil, soil, oil, and oyster with the "oi" hooked together as a single symbol.

5. completely new symbols were developed in ITA such as the letter "z" written in reversed form for sounds such as in the underlined part in daisy. with the underlined replaced by the reversed letter "z." (See Tiedt ,1982 for a further discussion).

Why was the ITA a fad which today probably is almost unknown?

1. the transfer from ITA to traditional print for students was difficult, even though the ITA sound/symbol relationships were quite consistent.

2. selected symbols of the 44 were quite foreign in appearance.

3. the question arose as to why students were to learn two sets of symbols in reading-- ITA initially, and then transfer to traditional symbols for reading instruction, generally at the end of the first grade or the beginning of the second grade.

4. forty-four symbols and their related sounds are many for students to learn.

5. selected ITA symbols are very difficult for students to write.

A second fad, among many others, was performance contracting which came into being in the early 1970s. Performance contracting stressed commercial companies offering their services to teach public school students. In contract form. a commercial company agreed with a local board of education as to the cost of an agreement signed by both the commercial company and the local board of education. In the contract, it stated how much gain in academic achievement per child in a school year would be guaranteed by the commercial company. If there were students who did not achieve what was spelled out in the contract, the local school district did not need to pay for educating those students as spelled out in the contract. Performance contracting came in with a bang and left without customers in a few years. Reasons for performance contracting failing were the following:

1. teachers taught directly to the test and thus student achievement was higher than otherwise would be the case.

2. the profit motive became the important thing for commercial companies. Cuts were made in faculty and materials in teaching students to increase profits to satisfy stockholders of the commercial companies.

3. little concern was shown toward students and teachers by the for profit companies who had contracts with public schools.

4. gains made by students per year were perceived as being artificial.

5. the entire philosophy of performance contracting was not acceptable to public school beliefs and goals (See Ediger, 1988, 66-67

for further discussion on performance contracting).

At the present time, performance contracting has come out with a new name--schools for profit.

When taking an education course entitled "Supervision of Student Teachers and Librarians," a resource person spoke in the class on "Nongrading the elementary school". The position of this speaker was to be an elementary school principal in a school for three to four years, approximately, to ungrade the school and then become principal of a different school for the same purpose. Presently, little is said or written about the nongraded school. The writer feels much energy was given by that elementary school principal and the school district in ungrading schools in the early 1960s. Little is left to show for the involved efforts. Perhaps, good elementary schools should always be nongraded, since grade levels mean little in terms of student achievement.Thus, each student needs to be given challenging materials to learn from, be provided with stimulating lessons, and at the same time be successful in learning. Each student then needs to achieve optimally, be it individually or within a committee involving collaborative endeavors (Ediger, 2000, 20-29). This philosophy is opposite of the setting high standards movement so prevalent today.

The high standards movement emphasizes the following:

1. predetermined high standards or obiectives should be achieved by <u>all</u> students with no exceptions.
2. there should be no social promotion of students. The J. E. B. Stuart School in Fairfax County, Virginia, has as a goal that "all students read at grade level on the eleventh grade," (Checkley,2000, 4).
3. teachers need to be accountable for students to achieve the high standards. Poor teaching, as shown by test results, should be dealt with so that learners achieve high standards.
4. competition needs to be emphasized so that teachers are motivated to do a better job of teaching. Merit pay can be a good motivator.
5. gaps in achievement between minority students and white students need to be eliminated.
6. report cards need to be published to make comparisons among schools and school districts to awaken teachers of low achievers to do a better job of teaching. The report cards should be published so that the lay public is informed about the quality of teaching in evidence when good schools are compared with bad schools.
7. educational bankruptcy laws need to be there if a school or school district achieves below a certain level. The state may take over the administrative duties as well as provide inservice education for all low achieving teachers. The quality of teaching and test results from

students should then improve up to a satisfactory level.

8. high stakes testing needs to be emphasized so that all students measure up to a desired level. Thus, high school students should pass an exit test before receiving a diploma.

9. vouchers should be available to students whose school is not doing a good job of teaching. With the voucher money received from the sending school, parents may select a different school for the offspring to attend, including a private/parochial school.

10. students should achieve "World Class Standards" so that they compare very favorably with those of other nations on the planet earth. Students should be first in mathematics and science achievement; otherwise the United States will no longer be able to compete in the economic arena with other nations.

Gratz (2000) indicates cautions that need to be emphasized when the high standards school of thought is implemented in the public schools. These cautions include the following:

1. piling on of homework for students.
2. abolishing recess time for students.
3. an increased number of students flunking due to not being able to meet the high standards.
4. more teaching to the test so more students pass high stakes exams.
5. not counting the low performers on test results when the final averages are turned in to the appropriate office, such as the state department of education.
6. more cheating on tests by changing incorrect to correct answers for machine scoring.
7. poorly written tests and without adequate pilot testing of the inherent items.
8. unrealistic rising expectations for student achievement.
9. tests determining the school curriculum.
10. use of standardized norm referenced tests to measure student achievement whereby these tests lack validity since there are no related objectives for teachers to use as benchmarks in teaching learners.

Constructivism as a Philosophy of Instruction

Constructivism is quite different from the testing/measurement movement to determine student progress. With testing, there is a numeral that indicates student achievement, such as a percentile. These state mandated tests are usually given once a year. With constructivism, the daily products/processes of student learning are in evidence. Written work, daily work in mathematics, projects, as well as individual /group endeavors are in the offing and ongoing. The

products/processes of students are revealed in portfolios, a purposeful sampling of student accomplishments. Portfolios are developed by the student with teacher guidance.

Portfolio results are open to viewing by responsible individuals, such as parents. They are evaluated by two or three professionals who are trained to do the assessing. Criticisms of the portfolio to be "used in assessing student achievement are the following:

1. it has much subjectivity involved in appraising the contents, even if rubrics are used. In answer to this criticism, there is an equal amount of subjectivity inherent in norm/criterion referenced tests (CRTS). Thus, the test items are chosen by human beings. Other test items could have been selected than those appearing on the norm referenced/CRT test. Each of the other sequential numbered items also has an opposite and equal reaction.
2. it is costly and time consuming to assess many portfolios, especially when outside evaluators are doing the job. Evaluators need training in scoring portfolios so that that Interscorer/interrater reliability might be in the offing. Teachers may be expected to assess the portfolios as a part of their work without additional compensation. This takes time and energy away from teaching responsibilities.
3. it provides too many variables for the viewer to evaluate, whereas with test results, a single numeral provides the needed information to notice learner achievement.
4. it cannot be pilot tested as can be the case for norm/criterion referenced tests.
5. it makes for a time consuming activity to appraise its contents (Ediger, 2000. 503-505).

What is the Answer?

What then is the answer in terms of standing firm in the midst of an onslaught of advocated new ideas in teaching and learning? How can educators determine with more certainty of what should be stable and what needs to be changed in teaching and learning situations? After all, school culture needs to experience stability and cannot be in a continuous flux. Instability in any institution makes for extreme feelings of insecurity. The following guidelines are offered to serve as a screen for attempting to maintain stability as well as for working toward improvement in teaching and learning situations:

1. keep that which is humane and appears to be working well.
2. study and diagnose weaknesses and make needed changes be it in the classroom , school, or school system.
3. avoid being swayed by high pitch sales people of new ideas in education.
4. engage in problem solving, as well as critical and creative thinking, when studying new approaches in education.

5. check the quality of research completed when a writer/speaker states that research says_____ . This is a complicated and indeed difficult task!

6. use agreed upon criteria to assess any new idea being proposed in education.

7. do not jump on the bandwagon too quickly.

8. stand up to pressure when new ideas are being proposed and one does not agree with the changes to be made.

9. differentiate between the concepts "reform" and "change." "Reform" is goal centered in a rational positive way, whereas "change" indicates any different way of doing things in the classroom.

10. stand firm until one is convinced that the reform is truly in a positive direction.

There are no end to the changes being advocated in the school curriculum. It truly is confusing when writers and speakers state the need to make changes continuously. It appears that no end to "change" is on the horizon from what is being done to something desired by the writer/speaker. There needs to be stability also in the curriculum. How would one know how to behave if everything were in a state of extreme rapid change in society?

Heath (1999) lists five changes that are positive and have come about, in whole or in part, in Lebanon, Ohio High School. These five recommended changes are blocking, mastery learning, team teaching, cooperative learning, and heterogeneous grouping. A problem arises as to how much of each of these trends a school should emphasize. The writer will choose one of five which has not been commented upon above. Thus, mastery learning has an action, but also an opposite and equal reaction. Mastery learning is strong, according to numerous educators, in aligning the evaluation procedures with the stated objectives, used as benchmarks by the teacher. Students then may perceive assessment as being more fair since they have studied items related directly to what will be tested. On the other hand, mastery learning can be quite rigid and formal since the objectives will contain only those things that can be measured/tested. This eliminates any openended questions which require problem solving, as well as critical an creative thinking. Measurability leaves no room for essay items and those that do not require machine scored test items with a resulting numeral such as a percentile to show achievement.

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